

**Testimony of Karen Kaplan
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**Concerning Raised Bill No. 5821
AN ACT CONCERNING DISTANCE LEARNING
March 10, 2008**

This testimony is provided on behalf of the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology.

We are pleased that the Committee on Education has chosen to discuss this bill and the issue of distance learning in Connecticut schools. We strongly believe that distance learning must be an available option for our secondary students if we are to most effectively meet their educational needs and prepare them optimally for the world in which they will live and work.

The provision of a statewide system of distance learning for schools makes online courses available to *all* of our public school students, regardless of where they live, which school they attend, or how much their parents earn. Distance learning provides a vehicle to bring more diverse course offerings to students, including subjects such as Mandarin Chinese, Forensics, and Economics. It provides schools with a way to help address teacher shortage areas, by sharing teachers remotely across district lines. It allows schools the chance to encourage student interest and learning in areas of greatest importance to our state, including courses in mathematics, science, and engineering. Through the continued development of our statewide distance learning system, we have the opportunity to address a variety of different student needs that many of our schools are currently unable to adequately meet within the confines of our traditional school structures.

The state's distance learning program for schools – The Connecticut Virtual Learning Center (CT VLC) - is being administered by the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium. This bill specifically mentions that *advanced placement* courses be delivered, which we endorse as appropriate offerings. However, we want to ensure that other categories of courses are also offered, as they are of equal importance to students and the needs of schools. Among others, these categories include 1) courses or course modules for credit recovery in core content areas, 2) foreign languages, and 3) science and mathematics (particularly for higher level courses and those that schools have difficulty offering because of teacher certification issues or lack of sufficient student numbers to justify the course).

Also related to the specific language of the bill, the last sentence is somewhat troublesome as worded. All local and regional school districts would not be *able* to participate, since the courses offered online will be designed for high-school aged students, and not all school districts educate secondary students. Perhaps language could be substituted that states that all districts that serve secondary students shall make available distance learning courses offered through CT VLC to their students. Language such as this will also ensure that secondary students are aware of CT VLC offerings and able to participate in their online courses.

In the last legislative session, the Legislature wisely enacted and funded the start up of this statewide distance learning initiative for schools. Currently, no funding has been proposed to continue the program beyond this fiscal year. The Commission for Educational Technology strongly encourages the Committee on Education to endorse and support continued funding of the existing distance learning initiative.